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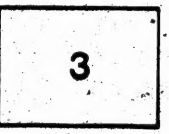

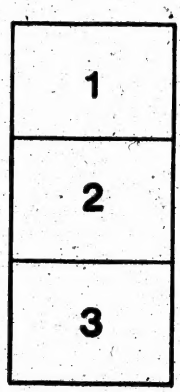

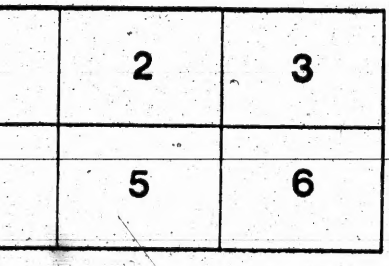

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY:

BEING

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE "PALLADIUM,"

UPON THE

THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION OF HIS EXCELLENCY

SIR F. B. HEAD,

AND A SECOND TO THE EDITORS OF THE

"PATRIOT," "CHRISTIAN GUARDIAN," & "COMMERCIAL HERALD,"

IN REPLY TO THEIR STRICTURES.

By JOHN ROAF,

MINISTER IN GEORGE STREET CHAPEL TORONTO.

PRINTED AT THE PALLADIUM OFFICE, YORK STREET, TORONTO.

1838.

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PROCLAMATION.

UPPER CANADA.

F. B. HEAD.

VICTORIA, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Queen, Defender of the Faith, &c. &c. &c.

To all our loving and faithful subjects, in our Province of Upper Canada—

GREETING:

KNOW YE, that taking into our most serious consideration, the merciful interposition of DIVINE PROVIDENCE, and that it hath pleased ALMIGHTY GOD to deliver us from the dangers and calamities of the unnatural Insurrection and Rebellion with which we have lately been afflicted: We have resolved, and by the advice of our Executive Council, for our Province of Upper Canada, do hereby *command*, that a day of PUBLIC THANKSGIVING be observed throughout our said Province, on Tuesday, the Sixth day of February next, so that all our people therein may humble themselves before ALMIGHTY GOD, and in the most devout and solemn manner send up their Prayers, Praises, and Thanksgivings, to the Divine Majesty, for having removed the heavy Judgments which our manifold provocations have most justly deserved; and for beseeching GOD still to continue to us His mercies, favor, and protection: and *we do strictly charge and command*, that the said day of PUBLIC THANKSGIVING be reverently and devoutly observed by all our loving Subjects, in our said Province of Upper Canada, *as they tender the favor of* ALMIGHTY GOD, *and would avoid His wrath and indignation, and upon pain of such* PUNISHMENT *as* WE *may justly inflict on all such as contemn or neglect the performance of so Religious and necessary a duty.*

In testimony whereof, We have caused these our Letters to be made Patent, and the Great Seal of our said Province to be hereunto affixed: Witness our trusty and well-beloved SIR FRANCIS BOND HEAD, Bart, K. C. H. &c. &c. &c. Lieutenant Governor of our said Province, at Toronto, this Twenty-second day of Jan. in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and thirty eight, and in the first year of our Reign.

F. B. H.

By command of His Excellency.

C. A. HAGERMAN, *Att'y General.*
D. CAMERON, *Secretary.*

To the Editor of the Palladium.

SIR,

His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor of this Province has issued a Proclamation for the observance of the 6th of February, as a day of "Thanksgiving," and, as in this case, I must publicly refuse obedience to authority, I feel bound to submit my reasons for so doing to the government and the public. Will you allow me the requisite space in the columns of your next number?

It is with me a religious duty to "honour," "pray for," "submit to," and pay due "tribute to" the "powers that be," wherever I reside, —*religious*, because required by God. I also admit that every man in this country is under immense obligations to love and praise God for preventing conflict and slaughter in the late insurrection, and so soon restoring peace. I cannot, however, obey the present "command" to "humble ourselves before Almighty God, and in the most devout and solemn manner send up our prayers, praises, and thanksgivings to the Divine Majesty;" because I cannot recognize any secular authority in religion where "Christ is all and in all," and claims to himself our entire faith and service. The Lieutenant Governor bears the commission of the Queen—but not that of Christ. Conscience is not his province; and spiritual allegiance to him would be treason to Heaven, as a woman's affections to a second man would be unfaithfulness to the husband; and as a recognition of a rebel and usurper would be disaffection to our lawful Sovereign. The Proclamation requires that "the said day" be "reverently and devoutly observed," as we "tender the favour of Almighty God, and would avoid his wrath and indignation." I cannot for a moment admit the promise of God's favour, and threat of his wrath and indignation, by a human being and a mere political officer. If, too, earthly rulers may, according to their own views, select days of religious observance, and "command" our compliance it would be right in a Roman Catholic King or Governor to appoint the fast and festivals of his Church, and conformity would be our duty. Hence the necessity of keeping spiritual and civil jurisdiction distinct. To avoid an apparent concession to spiritual assumption, I must disregard the present Proclamation. I must do so, too, because a "command" cannot induce true devotion, and in most cases will only lead to a mere hypocritical semblance of religion. Reverence and devoutness do not come by orders and threats—they are the result of personal conviction and humility and love towards God. Shops may be shut, prayers said, and sermons delivered—but contrition for sin or gratitude for God's mercies be unknown. A general mockery of religion and God is thus all that I expect to result from this state—religiousness; and in it I cannot have any participation. I further object to this appointment—because "*thanksgiving*" should be preceded by *humiliation* and *repentance*. Our late alarms and fears have been induced by sin, and the first step to be taken is an honest and a searching enquiry into the evils which have caused the displeasure of God, and hence the derangement of society. I do not refer to political errors—for as a stranger in the country I do not understand its politics, and as a Minister of Religion am indisposed to meddle with them. But political disorders are the consequents of moral diseases. We have lately seen the *symptom* only, not the *malady*—and it is a time now to ascertain (in good faith) what there is in the people or their rulers that has so early involved this fine country in trouble. God has suffered us to be afflicted because "we have provoked the Holy One

of Israel to anger;" and he now pauses to say "Why should ye be stricken any more?"—"Wash you, make you clean, put away the evil of your doing from before mine eyes, cease to do evil, learn to do well." Before, then, we rejoice and have thanksgiving, we should ascertain whether allowed ignorance, or "a haste to be rich," or any other vices are the cause of the disorganization that has arisen.

I am,

Mr. Editor,

Yours respectfully,

J. ROAF.

Bishop's Buildings, 1st Feb., 1838.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE "PATRIOT," "CHRISTIAN GUARDIAN," AND "COMMERCIAL HERALD."

GENTLEMEN:

In your strictures upon my letter in the "*Palladium*," you appear, in several instances, to have mistaken my meaning, and in others to have advanced principles in which I cannot silently aquiesce. I therefore beg leave to submit to you a few explanatory remarks—sincerely regretting to associate your very dissimilar articles in one reply, which, however, is rendered inevitable by your rules for the management of your several papers. The article in the "*Patriot*" exhibits an anxiety for truth and a Christian courtesy—that in the "*Commercial Herald*" is apparently the very best the writer could produce—that in the "*Christian Guardian*" is evidently insincere and spiteful.

Before I proceed to the principal subject in dispute, I must put myself right with respect to His Excellency—for it is insinuated that my letter was an expression of disrespect to the Executive Government. Now I am ready to disavow every such feeling—nor can I see any thing in my expressions to justify the imputation. I honor Sir F. B. Head as the representative of my Sovereign, and if I knew of any thing that I had said or done either contemptuous or hostile to him, I would at once offer the most ample apology. The religious body to which I belong has been distinguished by a patient and uniform fidelity to the present royal family in Britain, and an equal devotedness to popular liberty and education. My intention in my letter was to explain, that in refusing to observe February 6th as a day of thanksgiving, I withheld from His Excellency only a spiritual allegiance—an allegiance which I maintain, was claimed by the Proclamation, and which no man owes to another. So long as I reside in the Province, its Governors will have my full submission in all matters within their jurisdiction; and if I do not mistake the character of Sir F. B. Head, he will give confidence to some who do not claim *all* the loyalty of the Province, or attempt to insinuate away the innocence of their neighbors.

With regard to my objection to observe February 6th as the day of thanksgiving, I wish to be understood before I offer a further justification. I have before admitted the duty of thanksgiving; I am ready to acknowledge, too,

that His Excellency did well in selecting a day for general observance, and proposing that day to the community. But I maintain that His Excellency did more than this: he *commanded* that that particular day should be kept, thus making the observance an act of obedience to him—yea more, he commanded it "upon pain of such punisiment as he might justly inflict"!—yea more still, he promised "the favor of Almighty God" to those who obeyed the vice-regal *command*, and threatened "his wrath and indignation" to those who contemned or rejected it. Now this seems to me to be an assumption of the power "to bind and loose," to make the observance of that single day binding upon the conscience, to claim God's favor and wrath to ratify Sir F. B. Head's selection and command. I am quite willing to follow a good example and good advice; but when authority and compulsion are employed, I dare not recognize in man what I believe belongs *to Christ only*. The command and threats in the case make a momentous change in the proceeding. Were I to be asked by a poor man to help him, it might be my duty to do so; but were he to *demand* my money and threaten me with "such punishment as he might inflict upon refusal," compliance would be not *charity* but *cowardice*. The proclamation was not "based upon the acknowledgement of the Divine Supremacy in the conscience"—it makes the observance imperative, not because of the propriety of the act, but because of Sir Francis's threats and commands—the compliance was to be not a mere performance of what was right, but a recognition of authority to appoint specific days and take cognizance of religious acts. To thank God and keep a day for the purpose, I consider to be good—to recognize any second legislator in Christ's kingdom I think to be wrong. Let this explain my supposed inconsistency in saying, that I "submit to" state authorities, and yet refusing submission in the case of the proclamation. I "submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake"—but a matter of faith or conscience is not properly an ordinance of man. Every separate officer in society has his own appropriate jurisdiction; and as in "the Church of the thirty-nine articles," a Governor would not be allowed to perform clerical acts, so in the Church of Christ, he should not be allowed to exercise spiritual authority. The very Apostles that tell us "to be subject to the higher powers," refused to obey Magistrates and Emperors in things spiritual, and died as martyrs to maintain a simple fidelity to Christ. The Magistrate is a "Minister of God for good;" but it is in the office in which he is "a terror to evil doers and a praise to them that do well"—it is in his *judicial* capacity, and not as a spiritual legislator or executioner. In short, the case seems to be this—that if "the powers that be" are to judge of holy days, or forms on behalf of their people, then Christ's authority is not single and absolute in his Church, our faith will enquire not "what saith the scriptures?" but "what saith the proclamations?" If they may appoint *one* day, they may appoint *two*, or *fifty*, according to *their own discretion*. We must look to, and submit to their authoritative dictation, instead of employing our personal judgement on the Christian canon; and thus Protestantism will be a mere substitution of Kings and Governors for Popes, and Christianity will be (as infidels have urged) only a political engine.

But why be so scrupulous in these matters? Because I would not let the *small* end of the wedge be inserted, lest the *large* end should too soon follow. In religion every thing is of importance—and a quick sensitiveness is the first indication of a healthy conscience. Besides, amidst the confusion and violence incident upon the outbreak of a political conflagration, Christian guardians must

be on the alert to protect and rescue religious principles and rights, which are liable to be removed by ecclesiastical robbers. Our rulers do not wish the spirit of religion or religious liberty to be bowed down and crushed, by the measures employed to quell insurrection; and those that do wish it will find conscience indomitable, and the present British Government just. Deplorable, however, is it to see Ministers and Churches offering to "sell their birth-right for a mess of pottage," trying to seduce the authorities to purchase their blood-bought patrimony, by a few acres of wild land. The outburst of ecclesiastical servility, occasioned by my letter, shews a present imminent danger to religious liberty, that dearest right of man; so also does the attempted punishment of myself, for daring to act as a watchman of Zion, in the quartering of six militia men upon my family—the very means employed by the French Papists to break the spirit of the Protestant Clergy after the revocation of the edict of Nantes. However, I can once for all tell my uproarious abusers, lay and clerical, that with secular politics I will have nothing to do; but if they mean to prevent my maintaining the full rights of conscience, they must not resort to obloquy or annoyances, or clamor, or bribery—they must take my person.

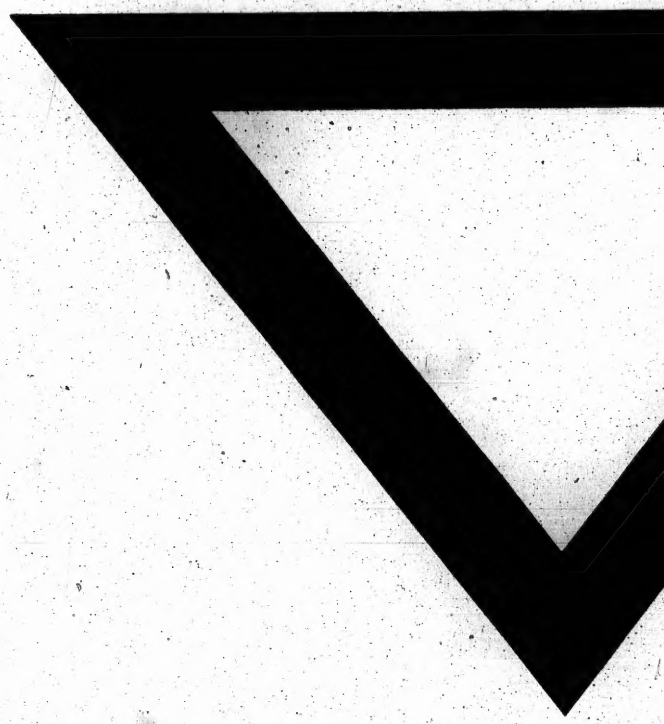
The "Patriot" has drawn into his argument the whole question of national religious establishments—a ground upon which on any suitable occasion I shall be happy to break a friendly lance or two with him. Dr. Owen and Matthew Henry (whose words are said to be quoted,) were great and good men, but not oracular, inspired, or perfect men—they lived in times in which popery (which has always loved state-religions) had been imperfectly eradicated—and their attention was given to the greater doctrines of salvation, and not to what is the appropriate work of present attention, ecclesiastical reformations. Now we Congregationalists have not "a faith standing in the wisdom of men," though they be even such men as Owen and Henry We consider it to be a duty of Kings and Rulers "to promote the public good both civil and religious, by all such means as are not subversive of public and private right"—but we consider, too, that national religious establishments *are* subversive of civil liberty and corrupting to religion, prevent public freedom and crush a private right of judgment. I am told "that a general mockery of religion and God has been quite as much the result of sectarian fanaticism as of state-religiousness." Well then, let us have neither the state-religiousness nor the sectarian fanaticism. This latter evil is a curse whether in an established sect or an unestablished. That much fanaticism was exhibited during the commonwealth is true, and so was much religion; and wherever a religious spirit is general and active there will be much that is spurious as well as much that is genuine, just as a trading community will contain many crafty speculators, and much liberty will be attended with some licentiousness. There are checks which nature and Providence soon bring to act upon fanaticism, and if instead of leaving it to these checks we employ an established church, we shall extinguish religion itself, with perhaps its counterfeit. David Hume, the Deist, advocated national religious establishments upon the ground that they checked excessive religion—and we know that any religion was with him excessive—When the Episcopal Church was re-established at the restoration it immediately brought in the lethargy in religion and licentiousness in morals, which disgraced the reign of Charles II. As for the French revolution—an established church had previously rendered religion despised and hated. The English dissenters are blamed for joining in political proceedings with infidels, &c. &c., but the

establishment robs and degrades all that do not belong to it, and all are driven into one common attitude of defence. And if some general resistance be not adopted *here* the tyrant-church will seize the public property, lift up her mitred front in courts and parliaments, and the despotism of the English villages will be spread o'er all the land. But why do church people blame us dissenters for coalescing with men with whom they themselves unite in supporting the church by tithes and church-rates, and whom they are obliged to admit to the sacrament, whenever required. The church publications were lately clamorous in their denunciations of the recent appointment of *Infidels* to *Professorships* and *Bishopricks*, and yet all are going on together in the church. Some men (like Dr. Paley) cannot afford to keep a good conscience. We love much of the spiritual part of the Episcopal Church, but are driven from her *secular* establishment—we say, "take away her battlements, for they are not the Lord's."

I remain,

GENTLEMEN,

Yours in the cause of Religion and Religious Liberty,

J. ROAF.

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